



29 March 2014

Mr. Tom Wheeler  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street Southwest  
Washington, DC 20554

**RE: Rural Healthcare Broadband Experiment Expression of Interest**

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Please accept this letter as an expression of interest from CHRISTUS Health, the fiduciary agency for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Rural Health Care Pilot Program in Texas to participate in the FCC Rural IP Experiment Funding. CHRISTUS is seeking \$7.5 million over three years to conduct Patient Telehealth Monitoring and Chronic Disease Care Coordination Programs, which will focus on vulnerable populations, populations that lack access to sufficient health care services and home bound individuals especially those in rural areas.

The goal of this project is to demonstrate the use of wireless broadband to extend coordinated care access to vulnerable, hard to reach populations while documenting the impact of eCare in non-traditional settings on health status and outcomes, patient satisfaction and the cost of care delivery. Another goal is to assure the presence of high available affordable broadband in rural areas. CHRISTUS has tested remote monitoring in the home with a few patients and were unable to afford every patient remote monitoring due to a lack of available broadband in some areas of Texas. Verifying and assuring broadband availability to these vulnerable populations is an important goal of our proposed project.

**Population Targeted**

Texas leads the nation in the incidence of diabetes and diabetic related co-morbidities. Across the community, childhood obesity and metabolic syndrome are precursors to lifelong chronic disease. Utilizing mobile health solutions (mHealth) to enable eCare will improve health status and outcomes while reducing costs. CHRISTUS' project will target children and seniors, two groups that can benefit from eCare. eCare and mHealth also enable the identification of

social and environmental factors of health status. This is an important component of improving quality and efficiency of care.

## **Collaboration Partners**

### **AT&T and Conterra**

AT&T and Conterra serve as the statewide master vendors for the Texas Health Information Network Collaborative (TxHINC), the FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Program (RHCPP) awardee for Texas. Utilizing RHCPP and Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) broadband subsidies, TxHINC negotiated a master contract for broadband services with AT&T and Conterra to serve safety net healthcare providers in rural and medically underserved communities in Texas and to assure that rural health care facilities had a minimum bandwidth of 45 Mbps. Under this proposal, CHRISTUS intends to utilize wireless and WiFi services to extend care delivery into nontraditional settings such as patient homes, skilled nursing facilities and nursing homes utilizing broadband enabled tablets owned by CHRISTUS and provided to patients.

### **Focus of Project**

CHRISTUS will implement the “Connect at Home and at School for Better Health (CAHSBH)” over a three year period.

This project will utilize wired and wireless technology provided by CHRISTUS Health to enable eCare in the home with patients upon discharge from the hospital in order to monitor their health and prevent readmissions. A key population for which we plan to conduct this experiment is pediatric patients so that the children and their families have a link to their care team while they continue monitoring them from home. CHRISTUS will also provide remote monitoring and eCare for persons in rural areas with chronic diseases in order to demonstrate the impact of eCare to their health status, cost of care and quality of life.

The state of Texas has no requirement that a public school have a full time school nurse on the premises. Last year, in Corpus Christi Texas, a high school football player died during a practice session from anaphylactic shock. The need to connect the public schools with distant health resources is of critical importance, especially in those schools that are in rural areas. Most of the 254 Counties in Texas are rural. One of our service provider partners provides broadband services to 128 independent school districts in Texas. There is statistical evidence that indicates at least half the students enrolled in public school in Texas are also enrolled in Medicaid.

The project plan includes:

1. Identification of patients for the pilot
2. At home care kit, already developed by CHRISTUS, for deployment in the home. The kit includes an IP enabled tablet; Bluetooth enabled scale, blood pressure cuff, pulse

oximeter and glucometer. For the schools, we plan to use the same kit repurposed for telehealth and to link the schools with pediatric primary care and specialty providers at the Children's Hospital.

3. With its partners, CHRISTUS will evaluate the availability of broadband, document its availability or lack thereof, and develop strategies to provide broadband.
4. Data sharing and exchanging among providers. The foundation for health information exchange is having sufficient broadband in place to exchange the data. As noted in Chapter 10 of the FCC's 2012 Plan, many facilities lack sufficient bandwidth for the simultaneous transportation of video, data and other data transfer needs.
5. Cloud based solutions that interface data from the EMR to the patient personal health record will be accomplished, as will the transition of data
6. CHRISTUS will determine patient and provider satisfaction with the system
7. CHRISTUS and its partners will measure the costs of care and develop evidence regarding its impact.

Care coordination staff that includes community health workers and care coordinators will be recruited, provided with mobile devices and become the first line of contact for the persons at home. They will coordinate and communicate with the clinical care staff to assure maximum outcomes.

The project will also serve as a demonstration project for the purposes of informing the Texas and Louisiana legislatures about the impact of eCare in nontraditional settings in order to spread its adoption across all settings.

This letter serves as an initial expression of interest. CHRISTUS Health is prepared to develop a more detailed proposal and provide an ROI model that demonstrates the impact of eCare. Should we be invited to participate, we will provide a fully detailed proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Hank Fanberg", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hank Fanberg

Associate Project Coordinator, FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Program, Texas  
Executive Director, Texas Health Information Network Collaborative (TxHINC)  
CHRISTUS Health, Director, Technology Advocacy